

WORKING MOTHERS GET RID OF YOUR GUILT

BY CONNIE BLAINE

As if all their other burdens weren't enough, working mothers in our culture must contend with a widespread, destructive myth—that staying at home is better for the children than working outside the home. There is no truth to this myth! In fact, research shows that when a woman is happy with her job, her children benefit.¹ Children learn their own self-esteem by identifying with the significant people in their lives. Mother's self-esteem and confidence, and satisfaction with her life, will rub off on her children whether she's working full-time or at home full-time. Likewise, a depressed or stressed-out mother will transmit her negative feelings to her children, whether she is employed or not. So employment is usually a non-issue in the psychological/emotional well-being of children. The critical thing is whether Mom is taking care of herself and is content in her own daily life.

A mother's own level of happiness, self-esteem and emotional maturity has a huge effect on her relationship with her children. And it is the **quality** of the parent-child relationship that matters. Mothers who are fulfilled themselves are not only good role models for their children, but are happier people, too! The research proves what common sense tells us—that happier people make happier parents, whether they work outside the home or not.

Single mothers have an even bigger load of baggage heaped on them: the myth that two-parent families are always better for kids than single-parent families. Again, research does not support that leap of logic! The critical thing, once again, is the **quality of the relationships in the home**.

The behavior and academic performance of children from single-parent families is as diverse as those of kids with two in-house parents. It's not whether both parents are living with the children that matters, but the self-esteem of the individual parents, the quality of their relationship with each other, and the quality of their parenting skills that matters! ²

Simply having two parents is no guarantee of love and harmony in the home, or of good parenting skills. So staying in an unhappy—even abusive—relationship “for the children” is not doing them any favor at all. In fact, the research also shows that the children who are most vulnerable to adjustment problems are those raised in homes with constant marital conflict.³

However, working parents **do** need to ensure that their children are receiving high-quality child care, because those caregivers are also significant people in their kids' lives. So caregivers also need to be good role models, with good parenting skills. Just like a happy home makes for well-adjusted kids, (and a chronically miserable marriage damages kids), day care can affect children either way. It depends, again, on the **quality** of the relationships the child is exposed to.

So relax, single moms. The best thing you can do for your children is to find happiness and fulfillment for yourself. It's a win-win situation. If you enjoy your work, are relatively happy in your relationships and your self-esteem is good, your kids are going to be fine. If not, you need to fix those problems for your own well-being, and your children will automatically benefit.

Source:

- 1 Kurtz, L. and Derevensky, J. L. Family configuration and maternal employment: Effects on family environment and children's outcomes. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 1994, 22 (1-2): 137-154.
- 2 Harvey, E. A. (1999) Short-term and long-term effects of early parental employment on children of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. *Developmental Psychology*, 35, 445-459.
- 3 Fergusson, D.M., Horwood, L.J., and Lynskey, M.T. Family change, parental discord and early offending. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry & Allied Disciplines*, 1992, 33(6):1059-1075